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Volume 8 | Number 3 Article 2

March 1980

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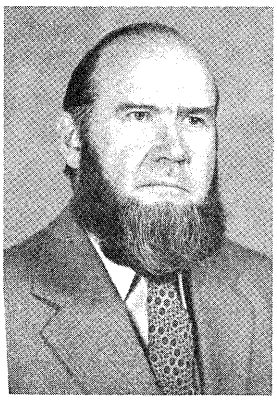

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Introduction

The word "covenant," one of the most-used terms in Reformed circles, brings a wealth of concepts with it. We speak of a covenant of works, a covenant of grace, a covenant of peace. We personalize covenant by designating it with the names of Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David. There is even the Noachian covenant which could be considered "the covenant with creation." Against a plethora of covenant designations the question arises—Is it proper to emphasize these particular covenants; are they not all expressions of one over-arching covenant of grace? These are matters Reformed theologians have grappled with, and the theological wrestling is still going on. (See the works of Meredith G. Kline for an unconventional, but certainly Reformed, perspective.)[1]

Whatever variation of Reformed covenantal view we may adhere to, we must still face a question of great significance: do the pulpit and pew have a different understanding of the meaning of "covenant"? Or, to phrase the query differently, is there a *Volks Theologie*, a people's theology which structures the way many in our congregations view their children, their "covenant" children—a view that is at variance with the official doctrine, the theology of the pulpit?

But there are additional matters to consider: we must not only study what is meant by the term "covenant" (in both the Old Testament and the New Testament), but we must also probe into its implications. (That is what separates scholastic theology from theology which is confessional, directive and dynamic.)

Another matter to which we must give some thought is the relation between the covenant and its tokens (or indicators). To use more conventional theological language, we seek to relate covenant and sacrament(s). Is it possible that we have become so concerned with the tokens that they have—in our *practice* at least—eclipsed or obscured that which they were supposed to reflect?

A caveat: covenant distortion

Before we proceed to examine the biblical givens of "covenant," it is proper that we acknowledge the limits that are placed on our understanding of this subject. A serious defect in Reformed thought may be its tendency to be overly systematic. As Reformed Christians we are known for *system*. We worship in an orderly manner (we follow an *order* of worship, although we are not excessively liturgical). We have catechetical preaching so that ministers will not burden their congregations with, say, seventy-eight sermons in a series on Obadiah. Our ecclesiastical assemblies have agenda which precede them and acts that follow. At least one Reformed communion has a prescribed book of church order and a hefty commentary on that non-canonical book.

This engrained concern for system, order, and logic certainly has many benefits, but it *can* become a *handicap*. It can destroy spontaneity and dehumanize relationships if it becomes the master instead of remaining the servant. Concern for logic or system has led some who call themselves Reformed:

a. to distort *election* so that, for practical purposes, the view is indistinguishable from *fatalism*;
b. to deny that God's grace extends to the non-elect and thus God's mercy is strained;
c. to denigrate the role of the individual Christian in sanctification—supposedly to give more glory to God. As a result the conduct of such "forensically sanctified Christians" leaves much to be desired.

Therefore, this caveat: we must view every Christian doctrine as containing an element of mystery, an aspect that is unfathomable. We do well to approach "covenant" with the same awe, with the same sense of inadequacy as when we try to "explain" trinity, immanence/transcendance, *Christus deus sed Jesus homo*.

If we view covenant merely, or even predominantly, in terms of system we will distort it. We must allow for a God who is not bound—certainly not to our puny-minded concepts—a God who works in an orderly way yet is not bound by system. When we view covenant in terms of its biblical givens, its built-in regulating or corrective concepts, then we are less likely to have a distorted covenant-view.

As Reformed Christians we believe in God's covenant dealings with His people. An essential part of "covenant" is the principle of *continuity*. Among Protestants it has been the Reformed Christians who have stressed the continuity of the Church and the continuity of the salvific operations in both testaments. As we note increased fraternization of our people with

evangelical Christians, we detect all the more emphasis on individualism, on a personalistic approach. There are problems in our understanding of God's covenantal dealings with his people; let us not deny this. There are mystifying elements in the biblical record; let us accept them. But we must not abandon the clear, biblical teaching of God's covenant dealing with his people. To do that is never justifiable and its consequences are terrifying.

I have just mentioned that an essential aspect of covenant is the *principle of continuity*. For a number of people in our churches I'm afraid that covenant is thought of almost exclusively as that which provides the continuity of the line of believers. That is, *covenant is reduced to one of its aspects*. Covenant is associated with guaranteeing the salvation of the next generation of Christians. To counter this and other aberrant views, let us look at biblical terms for covenant, specific instances of divine-human covenants and covenant structure.

Covenant Terms

The Hebrew word for "covenant" is בְּרִית. Like נָבִיא ("prophet"), this word has no clear etymology. Kohler and Baumgartner suggest its derivation from בָּרָה (not the בָּרָא meaning ["create"]), which means to eat bread with, or in the causative (*Hiphil*) stem, to give bread for consolation to someone (see II Sam. 3:35, where David in grief for Abner takes an oath that he will not assuage his distraught state with food that day).

The instances of בְּרָה are few, though these selections seem very plausible. Whatever the *etymology*, the *meaning* of בְּרִית is certainly not in doubt, as there are many citations of this word. Though it can be used merely to indicate an agreement or arrangement between men, the predominant usage is to describe a relationship between God and mankind. Geerhardus Vos in his *Biblical Theology* states:

> A purely one-sided promise or ordinance or law becomes a *berith* not by reason of its inherent conceptual or etymological meaning, but by reason of the religious sanction added. From this it will be understood that the outstanding characteristic of a *berith* is its *unalterableness*, its *certainty*, its *eternal validity* and not (what would in certain cases be the very opposite) its voluntary, changeable nature. The *berith* as such is a "faithful" *berith*, something not subject to abrogation. It can be broken by man, and the breach is a most serious sin, but this again is not because it is the breaking of an agreement in general. The seriousness results from the violation of the sacred ceremony by which its sanction was affected (p. 33).

The late Professor John Murray would become quite animated when speaking about *berith*. To him it was abhorrent that the biblical concept become associated with a popular concept of agreement or even contract. This writer remembers Murray raising his voice and scowling as he reminded his students that the best word he could think of to describe *berith* was "dispensation—despite what some people have done with that word—a dispensation of God's sovereign grace." Murray wished to direct his budding theologians away from mutual-defense-pact paradigms toward a uni-lateral, sovereignly-initiated, binding arrangement.

It is proper at this point to say a few words about the Greek word that is used

to translate בְּרִית. The Septuagint translators were not able to find a Greek term that could match the Hebrew concept. Indeed this is a common problem of translation. διαθήκη, from διατίθημι, originally meant a "disposition that someone made for himself." Thus it could refer to a will or a testament, and so it might have the opposite meaning of *berith* as used to portray the divine-human dispensation. Particularly inappropriate is διαθήκη meaning *testament/last will*, since the divine *berith* speaks God's unchanging decree. Vos suggests that despite these difficulties the Septuagint translators opted for διαθήκη since it was the lesser of two evils. συνθήκη would suggest equality of partners entering the relationship (pp. 33-34).

> But we must not abandon the clear, biblical teaching of God's covenant dealing with his people. To do that is never justifiable and its consequences are terrifying.

(Now, that has produced this situation: διαθήκη in the Septuagint—and in the New Testament sections that depend on an Old Testament reference to covenant—must be understood as meaning what בְּרִית signifies. But when διαθήκη in the New Testament does not directly relate to a בְּרִית Old Testament quote or allusion, does it mean "covenant" or "testament"? There may even be a play on the word—see Hebrews 9:15, 16 in the New International Version which uses "covenant" and then "will," vs. The Authorized Version which used "testament" twice.)

Berith is used as early as Genesis 6, when God makes a covenant with Noah (v. 18). It is again found in chapter nine where, humanly speaking, because of Noah's faithful response a covenant is now made with the earth. The section, however, which most clearly displays the features of *berith* in the Genesis revelation is in the account of God's relationship with Abraham. Chapters 12, 15, and 17 contribute to the total picture. (In passing, note that despite the absence of *berith* in chapter twelve there is a covenant-relation; thus it is not improper to read Genesis 2 and 3 in terms of covenant, for it, too, contains the essentials.)[2]

Covenant Idioms: "Cutting a Covenant" and "Being Cut Off"

We need both the Genesis 15 and Genesis 17 accounts to round out the picture of God's covenant with Abraham. The former contains an emphasis on a strange ritual—the three animals and two birds and a theophany of smoke and light in the midst of the pieces. The second account introduces the rite of circumcision. Both the circumcision rite and the animal/bird ritual help to clarify the idiom of covenant-making. The verb most frequently used when initiation of the covenant is in view is literally "cut" כָּרַת ("establish," קוּם, "give," נָתַן, and "enter," בּוֹא, are also used).[3] Why does the idiom to make a covenant employ כָּרַת, "to cut"? Kline rather convincingly shows that it is the concept of malediction in the ritual.[4] The maker and the recipient pledge their faithfulness, and they portray their willingness to be dismembered should they break covenant. Yahweh in the theophany of the smoke and light (a preview of the pillar of cloud and fire of the wilderness?) passes between the pieces of the animals.

But circumcision is also a cutting. Here there is blending of *malediction* (so would the man be destroyed, i.e., cut off if he broke the covenant), *blessing* (cir-

cumcision indicates removal of defilement - see Col. 2:11 ff), and *identification*: the circumcised are marked as covenant men. Since circumcision brings all these elements together it is even called the covenant: Gen. 17:10, "This is my covenant"; Gen. 17:13, "my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant"; Acts 7:8, "he gave them the covenant of circumcision."

The *cutting* of a covenant and the *cutting* of circumcision are reflected on in another idiom. A recurring phrase in the Old Testament is the warning that whoever breaks such and such a law will be "cut off from my people." Hebrew has several verbs that can express "be killed," i.e., הָרַג, "kill," נָכָה, "strike," הָמִית "cause to die," etc. Thus it is significant that the idiom "be cut off" and "I will cut (him) off" are so frequently used. The allusion must be to the breaking of the covenant and the attendant invoking of the sanctions.

The Old Testament writers from Moses to the prophets use "cut off" in the passive, or Niphal, to express the judgment of the Lord on the covenant-violator. "He will be cut off" does not mean that the sinner will lose his civil rights or his standing in the community. Indeed it includes loss of those privileges, but he is not free to choose another nation with which to associate. The judgment is death! He has despised Yahweh, giver of life.

In Exodus 12:15, 19, one who eats leavened bread during the seven days of the Passover "shall be cut off from Israel." Verse nineteen adds the note that this law applies to the native-born as well as the alien. Covenant blessings and responsibilities were impartially administered to all Israel.

The sacred perfumed oil used for the ordination of the high priest was banned for general use in Exodus 30:33, 38. Anyone attempting to capture its formula and/or use it for domestic purposes would be "cut off."

The Sabbath is a particular sign of covenant blessing as well as an obligation. (Meredith G. Kline views the Sabbath in terms approaching a *sacrament*.) Sabbath breakers too are liable to the extreme punishment (Exodus 31:14). Numbers 15 seems to use an incident of Sabbath violation as a particular to underscore the general principle: willful violation of God's commandments brings about being "cut off." Thus it is stated in Numbers 15:30, 31:

> But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the LORD, and that person must be cut off from his people because he has despised the LORD's word and and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off. . . .

Then Numbers 15:32-36 describes the fate of the Sabbath wood-gatherer: upon the command of the Lord he had to die. The assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death.

The greatest number of citations of this use of כָּרַת are found in Leviticus. Punishment for various infractions of divine law is the severe "cutting off."

> Lev. 7:20—*eating* the meat of the peace offering sacrifice while one is ceremonially unclean.
> Lev. 7:21—touching something unclean while eating meat of peace offering sacrifice.
> Lev. 7:27—eating blood.
> Lev. 18:29—doing any of "these detestable things."
> Lev. 19:8—violating the regulations for proper eating of the

fellowship/peace offering.
Lev. 20:17—incestuous relations: "they must be cut off before the eyes of their people."
Lev. 20:18—other improper sexual intercourse: "Both of them must be cut off from their people."
Lev. 22:3—ceremonially unclean person coming near the sacred offerings. . . "that person must be cut off from my presence. I am the LORD."
Lev. 23:29—"Anyone who does not deny himself on that day (the Day of Atonement) must be cut off from his people."

See also Numbers 19:13 and Numbers 19:20 for one who touches the dead without purifying himself or who is ceremonially unclean (for another reason) and does not purify himself: "he must be cut off from the community, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD."

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Yet the references are not always negative. In the book of Ruth—a book which speaks so beautifully about the ingrafting of a Gentile into the stock of Israel—we see the combination of the covenant promises of "descendants" with the "blessing on all nations." Imbedded in Boaz's covenant reaffirmation is the reversal of the negative use of "be cut off." Ruth 4:10 reads:

> I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear [lit., be cut off] from among his family or from the town records. Today you are witnesses!

This is not an incidental happening. It is one of the most important, though often overlooked, "covenant" sections in the Old Testament. Following Boaz's speech is the response of the elders: recognition of the legal action and pronouncement of blessing on Ruth. Note the blessing. Ruth is to be like Rachel and Leah. Boaz is to have status in *Ephratah*, become famous in *Bethlehem*. That Ruth is from Moab is not considered a deterrent to divine blessing, for Yahweh blessed ancestor Perez even though the circumstances of Tamar's liason with Judah were not above reproach.

Upon the birth of son Obed, the women praised the Lord and blessed Naomi. The kinsman-redeemer not only continued Naomi's (and late husband Elimelech's) line, but also linked them to David, the future king of Israel and to David's Great King. (See the mention of Tamar-Rahab-Ruth in Matthew's otherwise exclusively male genealogy. Matt. 1:3, 5.)

The theme of being "cut off" from God's people is carried through in the New Testament by Paul, to relate to the mystery of Israel and the Gentiles. Paul, like Moses centuries earlier, would rather be destroyed (be made ἀνάθεμα if it would bring about Israel's salvation. The NIV translates Rom. 9:3 as follows: "I could wish myself *cursed and cut off* from Christ for the sake of my brothers." Thus the translators connected ἀνάθεμα with both the con-

cept of "being cut off," as expressed in Romans 11:22 (Rom. 9-11 is a unit) by ἐκκόπτω , and the modified concept "be broken off" which fits well with the "grafting of branches" figure.

Covenant: Key to the Scripture

It is in covenant itself that we find the explanation both for the idiom "cut a covenant" and for this often-used threat of destruction that appears in "non-covenant" sections: "he will be cut-off." This provides an index to the importance of "covenant" as a key paradigm in understanding the Scriptures.

Meredith G. Kline's monograph, *The Treaty of the Great King*, shows that Deuteronomy follows the pattern of a treaty.[5] The suzerain-vassal treaty format of Deuteronomy includes such features as the introduction of the suzerain who cites his record of previous dealings with his vassal, especially his beneficent deeds. In the political treaties the suzerain calls on the gods (his own and the vassal's) to witness the transaction. Note that Yahweh points to himself, swears by himself. Blessings for keeping, curses for breaking the treaty are cited. Even the matter of copies of the treaty has parallels in the biblical record (not in Deuteronomy proper, but in the Exodus account forty years earlier). One copy is retained by the suzerain, one by the vassal; they are kept in the temple of the respective gods. Two tablets, each containing all the commandments, record the covenant. Yahweh is both giver (suzerain) and the oath (no external gods are employed) so the two copies are kept in the sanctuary. Yahweh is "reminded" by the tablet that the covenant has been made. As the political treaty was read periodically (as stipulated in the arrangement) so also the covenant provisions (with blessings/cursings) were to be rehearsed with the people. Thus the *people* would be reminded of the covenant.

Covenant Indications in "Non-covenant" Sections of Scripture

If Deuteronomy is in the form of a treaty with such obvious parallels as those just cited, then we ought to be able to detect these features elsewhere. Certainly Exodus 20 and similar sections have features of a treaty. Genesis 15 and 17, already cited, displayed these features *mutatis mutandis*. The implied threat/curse, "he shall be cut off," applies to the covenant breaker and means death, not simply banishment from the community. This severe punishment is mandated because the curse of the covenant is invoked.

It is our contention that in both testaments "covenant" provides a framework, or paradigm, through which the Scriptures are to be viewed. This is not to say that this is the *only* model to be used. For the Scriptures are so rich that there is a constant overlapping of features. For instance the Scriptures contain the following themes, each of which is rather complex yet each can further be subsumed under some aspect of covenant:

- -the creation, fall, expulsion narratives
- -the Abrahamic family - Israelite nation
- -the theocracy/Davidic line
- -the Aaronic priesthood
- -the prophetic order: Samuel through John the Baptist
- -the ceremonial and sacrificial systems

In reading some of the *reflective* literature of the Old Testament, i.e., the Psalms and other wisdom literature, one can pick up, for instance, the themes of *creation*:

He founded it on the seas
He established it on the floods
(Psalm 24:2);

or of the *redemption-from-Egypt*:

> He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through and he made the waters to stand as an heap (Ps. 78:13; Ps. 78 *passim*).

These themes also contribute to "covenant," or, to phrase it differently, "covenant" binds/unifies these accounts. There are, however, elements not as easily identified, elements which "covenant" helps to explain. For example, "as the Lord lives" חַי יְהוָה is a frequent expression on the lips of the characters of Old Testament times. Sometimes it is used by the prophets who express it as the words of the Lord himself, i.e., "as I live says Yahweh." To the casual reader this introductory formula seems like verbiage at best, in some instances an unjustifiable use of the divine name. The expression *is* an oath. In political treaties the suzerain called on the name of his god, as witness. In the biblical counterpart there is no god upon whom the Almighty can call, no god that is, other than himself. This is what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews refers to in Hebrews 6:13f, in a passage which is patently covenantal:

> When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants."

God's prophets come with an authoritative message of God. God pledges himself for the authentication of the message. Notice this dynamic declaration of Jeremiah:

> As surely as I live, declares the Lord, even if you, Jehoiachim, son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear—to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians (Jer. 23:24, 25).

This selection has a double reference to covenant: the "as I live" formula and the breaking-covenant action of removing a signet (authenticating) ring, i.e., a disavowal of relationship, a repudiation of that which otherwise would be an authentication pledge.

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In a similar way the promises and blessings of the Bible should be viewed as covenant promises, covenant blessings. "Covenant" is not a kind of "filler," an adjective that could just as easily have been omitted. Covenant-promises and covenant-blessings mean blessings and promises for which God has pledged his own life as the guarantee that they will happen. Thus it is also with the threats and maledictions of Scripture. Notice how closely the curses are associated with blessings. The Israelites were to proclaim God's blessings for obeying the commands, and God's curses for disobedience. Mt.

Gerezim is set over against Mt. Ebal. Blessings rest on thousands who "keep my commands" but punishments accrue "to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me." Note also the curses in Eden for breaking the covenant. Wasn't the curse on the serpent the greatest blessing for Adam, Eve and their descendents, indeed *for* the cosmos itself?

These few covenant-indicators have at least shown the plausibility of considering a great number of sections in the Bible in a more forceful, meaningful way. More than that, these covenant-allusions create a presumptive argument for considering the Bible as a covenant-document. This has implications for biblical scholarship, and it means that we are no longer to concentrate narrowly on particular covenants when we use the term in reference to covenant children. To be sure, there are particular covenants mentioned in the Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament. But if we view the whole of Scripture covenantally, then we will be kept from one-sidedness, from construing covenant in terms of *continuity alone*, or even *primarily* as embodying the *continuity principle*.

Children and The Covenant

We now come to the relation of children to the covenant. By now it should be evident that covenant has the widest implications for the people of God. The covenant in the Old Testament obviously included the children since the covenant sign, circumcision, was incised in the flesh of week-old male children. The relation of New Testament believers—to whom circumcision no longer applies—to the covenant is the matter which has divided Reformed (and Lutheran, Catholic, Anglican) Christianity from those of anabaptist persuasion. Since it is not our purpose to re-establish the grounds for the Reformed position, we will not consider the classic texts of Acts 2:39 and Matthew 18:2ff.

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, pertinent references to children are infrequent. There are many citations of "children" in the concordance but most have to be dismissed. For many references to "children" do not refer to individuals below the age of majority at all. In the older translations of the Bible a great number of Old Testament references have to be disregarded since they refer to "the children of Israel" or "the children of Ephraim, Ammon," and simply designate those particular nationalities. Secondly, there are statements, like "we are Abraham's children," which, again, do not mean Abraham's "boys and girls," but his descendants. Thirdly, "children" can be a term of endearment, as when Jesus said to his grown-up ex-fishermen, "Children have ye any meat?" (KJV), which could better be translated, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" (NIV). "Children of the light, children of the day" (I Thess. 5:5 KJV) similarly are not references to *age*, but to *affiliation*.

We are left, then, with a reduced number of references to children as such. Of these, more have to be pared away since the reference may be the footnote to a census or an explanation of the composition of a crowd (e.g., Matt. 14:21, about 5,000 men besides women and children).

It simply has to be admitted that the biblical authors did not have the perspective, so common in our age, of the prominence (and rights!) of children. Women and children, especially to the Old Testament authors, were considered part of the family and were not generally singled out for attention. Nevertheless, there are some passages that deserve consideration.

We have already stated that by the rite of circumcision inclusion in the covenant people was indicated. And since the rite was performed on the Israelite *boys*, they were included. When we consider the Passover rite, we are not specifically told "this includes the children." But we should not expect that either; why should the circumcised Israelite be excluded from the rite of communion? Communion speaks to community in an on-going way. Circumcision relates to initiation into the community.

Yet there is additional information. Exodus 12 contains the regulations for eating the communion meal. (Only the material relating to the question, "Who eats it)" is cited.) Exodus 12:3b:

> each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.[4] If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share it with the nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.

That should be pretty clear. If only husband and wife *ate* there would hardly be any differences in size among various families. Even with a grandparent extending a family it is unlikely that there would be the need for such a regulation. What we have here is the difference brought about by one *family* (note the use of that term in Ex. 12) having more children than another. A family with one or two small children might not be able to *consume* a whole lamb. But a family with several teenagers might have to limit the number of lamb chops per growing boy!

Similar to the attendance at Passover is the presence of families at times when the covenant was re-ratified. In Joshua chapter twenty-four we have the account of the assembling of all the tribes at Shechem. Joshua addresses them and challenges them to serve Yahweh. Not only do we find that dynamic confession of Joshua, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (v. 15), but the responses that Joshua provokes from the Israelites come from "the people," "all the people." As Joshua includes *his family* in his own covenant-ratification response, so the Israelites speak for *their families*.

> But if we view the whole of Scripture covenantally, then we will be kept from one-sidedness, from construing covenant in terms of *continuity alone*, or even *primarily* as embodying the *continuity principle*.

The renewal of the covenant after the exile follows, in the main, the Joshua-pattern. In Nehemiah 8:3, Ezra reads the Law aloud from daybreak until noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and *others who could understand*. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Nehemiah 8:6 says: "Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen, amen.' Then they bowed down and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground."

"Men, women and children" is a usual sequence in the listing of the constitution of a crowd. Hebrew uses "the ones understanding/having insight" (מבינים Hifil participle from בין used substantively). This comes in the place of "children"

and most likely refers to the older, knowledgeable ones of that group.

For its size—about one-third the length of the Old Testament—the New Testament provides proportionately more references to children. Two important texts relating to children are Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20. There can be no doubt that the τέκνα who are addressed here are children. In both contexts these verses come after remarks have been made about the duties of women, and before a section dealing with the obligation of slaves. τέκνα is not used here as an expression of endearment. The Ephesian and Colossian accounts both demand obedience to parents. The accounts differ in the reasons for this obedience: in Colossians, one reads, "for it is pleasing to the Lord"; however, in Ephesians, "for this is right" (δίκαιον). But the Ephesian admonition appends the commandment from the Law ("Honor our father and mother"), commenting that this is the first commandment with a promise: "That it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

We have probably read this verse often, and many Christians are used to hearing the original commandment, with this promise, every Sabbath. But note that the *children are specifically addressed here.* Paul *expected the children to be listening to the law of God.* The fourth commandment is not part of the law for adults who should be aware of their obligations to their own (now aging) parents. Certainly that is not excluded. But Paul understood the fourth commandment as a particular duty or obligation for children. Following this charge to children is Paul's reminder (v. 4) that fathers have duties, in turn, toward their children. Fathers are obligated to instruct and train their children in the way of the Lord.

Paul thus brings us right back to the Law, with parents and children both duty-bound to keep the covenant stipulations, for the LORD is their God. They must respond in loving service to him, since children are included. Were children outside the covenant, we might expect them to be ignored, or, more likely, expect that they would be challenged *first* to believe. Rather the obligation is to obey, to respond as covenant-keepers, because the *promise* relates to them.

Conclusion

"Covenant" provides particular insight in the interpretation of various sections of the Scriptures. Indeed, it is our claim that all biblical revelation should be seen in the framework of covenant. The direction which the covenant perspective provides will steer us clear of the Scylla of fundamentalistic literalism and the Charybdis of pseudo-Reformed scholasticism.

Yahweh, covenant God, has shown (revealed) himself in such a way that man cannot react dispassionately. God (and his revelation) must either be wholeheartedly accepted—God pledges his life to such people—or rejected. Those who reject it bring on themselves God's curse of utter destruction.

Notes

[1]Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968); *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); and *The Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

[2]Hosea 6:7 in *The New International Version*: "Like Adam they have broken the covenant." The Authorized Version has: "But they like men have broken. . ." The newer translation is certainly possible since the Hebrew is כאדם עברו ברית.

[3]See, for instance, Genesis 15:18, Exodus 23:32, 34:10, 12, 15, 27, and Jeremiah 31:32. For הקים ברית, see Genesis 17:7, 13, 19, 21; for נתן ברית Genesis 17:2 and for כרת ברית Ezekiel 16:8.

[4]Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, pp. 39ff.

[5]Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King*.